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AUTHOR Nadler, Arie
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ABSTRACT

Although social psychology has always had an interest in helping behavior, only recently has the full complexity of helping relations begun to be researched. Help seeking and receiving in the educational setting raise many issues regarding the use and effectiveness of the help itself. Central to all helping relations is the seeking/receiving dilemma which is characterized by a double-edged emotional sword. The self-threatening aspects in seeking aid produce a motivation not to seek help so as to protect self-esteem. On the other hand, the benefits in seeking help related to task completion produce a motivational force in the opposite direction. Help which is viewed as non-ego-threatening, designed to amend a specific deficiency, and in which the seeker is an active participant in the assistance, is more readily sought than help which fosters dependency. For receiving help to be effective, the recipient must feel that he should and can better his situation. The self-threatening aspects of seeking help are viewed as a challenge which leads to more self-help efforts and eventual self-improvement. However, the paradox of help receiving is that those people who most need help are least likely to receive it since they tend to foster dependency. (Introductions of the five program participants and abstracts of their presentations conclude the document). (BL)

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HELP SEEKING AND RECEIVING

Discussion paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada, April 11-14, 1983.

Arie Nadler, Ph.D.
Visiting Assoc. Professor
Department of Psychology
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, CANADA R3L 2G8

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Discussion of AERA session

on Help Seeking and Receiving

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Research and theory on helping behavior is not a new phenomenon in Social Psychology. In fact,anyone who opens a major textbook in the field will soon discover that at least one chapter is always devoted to the social psychology of helping. Yet,this title may be misleading. In the past 15-20 years the term Social Psychology of Helping has meant one thing:Studying variables that affect the giving of help. Using such a perspective much of the research in this area has examined helpingbehavior rather than helping relationships.

Recently ,the full compiexity of helping relations is more fully realized by social psychologists working in the area. Questions that relate to the beginning of this interaction (i.e.,the seeking of help)and to its long term effects (i.e., the recipients' reactions to being helped) are being focused upon. It seems that finally have social psychologists begun to explore the full range of helping relations.

Improtantly, this research asks major qwuestions about the effectiveness of helping relations. Issues regarding the utilization of existing formal and infromal helpers,and the effectiveness of the help itself. Does it serve as a springboard for action which will promote future independece and self relaiance or does it encourage continued dependence and leads to an helplessness like state.

The implications of these issues are relevant to a wide variety of applied settings and the educational setting in which helping is an ingrained aspect is foremost in this regard.

The papers in the session attest to the rich heuristic and applied value of the consideration of reserach and theory on help seeking and receiving in the educational context. They cover a wide

range of helping relations within the school system. Some touch upon informal helping encounters, whereas others center on formal helping relations. Although most center on the student as a help seeker and help recipient, Glidewell's paper importantly extends this analysis to the teaching profession and discusses informal helping relations between teachers. In fact, the richness of the issues involved would call for several rather than a single session devoted for this area.

Although the different presentiations intoday's session have dealt with different settings and different helping relations *they all share some common themes regarding help seekign and receiving in the educational context.* Let me begin by sharing with you what I see as that common background for the different contributions.

Implicit in all the disucssions presented today is what may be termed as the seeking/receiving dilemma. This dillema is associated with the simple fact that being helped by another to accomplish a task is a double edged emotional sword. *On the one hand being helped contains self threatening elements of public admission of failure,inability to obtain pride in own achievment and establishing an unfavorable status hierarchy between oneself and one's helper.* On the ohter hand,the receipt of help *has obvious instrumetval benefits.* It can help the person to overcome his or her current difficulty and achieve success in completing the task. The probelmatic nature of seeking and recieving help is that these two inherent aspects of help are to be found in most helping interactions, they generate motivations for oposite behaviors. As noted by much research in social psychology the self threatening aspects in aid produce a motivation not to seek help so that self esteem may be protected. At the same time the petential instrumental benefits in seeking and receiving help

produce a motivational force in an opposite direction: To seek help so that the task at hand may be completed and the state of need aleviated. Viewed from this perspecitve helping may be viewed as a behavior involvoing approach avoidance conflict.

Taken from this perspective the contributions in today's session can be viewed as trying to define the variables that affect the delicate balance between the approach and avoidance elements that are inherent to the helping situation. Although each has centered on a different aspects of this dillema,all have acknowledged it as a major feature of helping relations.

Conceptually,two major concepts can be seen as the connecting threeads between the different presentations: The ego threat potential the help and the degree of perceived control over future fate that the recipient of help would or would not enjoy.

Looking first at the concept of the ego relevance of help,it would seem safe to conclude that help which is viewed as non ego threatening will be more readilly sought than help which is.This is explicitly stated by Fisher in his threat to self esteem conceptualization,by Ames who has proposed the distinction between ego and task orientation of the help seeker,and by Glidewell who found that when the seeking of help does not conflict with deeply ingrained pofessional values,more explicit help seeking occurs. Imnortantly ways to avert this inhibiting effects of ego threat on help seeking have been suggested In fact,Ames and Nelson LeGal approaches would suggest that if one was able to highlight the implications of seeking or not seeking help for the task in question rather than for the ego,help will be sought more easilly. The recent developments in the

area of self awareness suggests some ways in which this refocusing of attention on the task could beachieved. Also, it would seem quite likely that conceptually relevant personality characterisics will play a major role in this regard. For example,following on the distinction made by Ames between ego and task orientations,it would seem that field independnt students would be more task oriented than those who are field dependnet.

But once the seeking of help is ego relevant,as is often the case in educational achievment oriented settings,it is potentially self threatening and may therefore not be sought . Here the concpet of percived control features paramountly. he discussions of Ames and Nelson LeGal suggest that to walk this tight rope of the helping dillema,and increase instrumentla help seeking,available sources of help should be constructed such that they leave the needy individual who seeks help with a degree of perceived control over the utilization of help to obtain the final solution. In fact,it seems form these discussions that if the seeking of help is ego relevant ,like most helping encounters in educational settings are,more help is likely to be sought if the person in need maintains cognitions that are related to their degree of perceived control over their future fate. *Thus,if the help is presented as designed to amend a specific or temporary deficiency it is more likely to be sought and utilized effectively as a spring board for future self reliance.* Under such conditions,the emotional strain protentially associated with the seeking of ego relevant help is partly averted by giving the person a sense of self achievment and accomplishment,even though help had been sought.

This general proposition regarding the role of perceived control is congruent with other recent developments in social psychology. For

example,it is consistent with *Janof-Bulman* findings regarding the effectiveness of behavioral self blame for effective coping with victimization experiences,and with the suggestion made by *Brickman and his colleagus about the merits of helping models that assign responsibility for the utilization of the help to the recipient.*

How can this be achieved? How could one attach perceptions of control to a helping encounter?. Some developments in social psychology suggest ways. To mention just one,the work on learned helplessness in humans tells us that lack of effort attributions can be instilled to avert helplessness like state. Another major factor in this regard is the way in which help that is sought is being delivered. Relevant here is the distinction drwan by Nelson LeGal between executive and instrumental help seeking. This distinction is drwan from a developmental perspective,but is highly similar to other distinctions made in the literature,not too frequently I should add. I would like to see this distinction as related to dependncy or mastery oriented help seeking. he mastery oriented help reflects a person's request for partial assistance that will leave them with major responsibility for applying the help to the problem,and will therefor allow the person to maintain a sense of percieved control over their fate,even though they sought help. The dependnecy oriented help on the other hand ,provides the person with full solutions. This help assumes the recipient's passivity and robes them of any perceptions of control over their fate. To make the distinction clearer,one could think about providing a person in need for food with fishing rods or with cooked fish.

I would like to argue here that the mastery oreinted help would

be less self threatening and therefor more easilly sought,and once received it should result in more effective utilization of the help which would eventually result in independence and self reliance. Thus,if one wanted helping to be instrumental and facilitate future self relaince rather dependnece ,helping programs should be designed so that students percieve themselves as being active in applying the assistance to solve their difficulties. Finally in this regard I would like to note the implications of this distinction between mastery oriented and dependnecy oriented help seeking to the case of the underpriviledged student. Asser's findings regarding differential helping styles of higher and lower socio-economic classes are particularilly important here. Asser found that while members of lower classes engage in dependnt help seeking,members of higher classes engage in mastery oriented help seeking. Applying this to the educational context suggests that the underpriviledged student *maintains this unfortunate position partly at least because of a dependent style of utilizing available resources of assistance.* Further,it would suggest that if these children were taught to seek mastery oriented help they may regain a sense of control and break the vicious cycle of dependency and competence. owever, this speculation is open for support or refutation by more research.

Up to this point I have discussed the way in which percived control and ego threat relate to the effective seeking of help. Let me conclude this discussion by referring to the only contribution today that has centered on the effects of receiving help. I wish to devote attention to the implications of Bella's research on the variables that determine *whether recieiving help will be effective in promoting future self reliance or not.* I believe that here again the concepts of

ego threat and perceived control feature in a paramount manner.I shall relate to the finding which I see as being of the major imortance Namely, that high achievers who received self threatening help (i.e., fronm a same age peer) performed better than low achievers who received self threatening help. Beyond its obviuos applied implications for peer tutoring programs,it suggests that for help to be effectively utilized the person receiving it should be motivated to invest self help efforts (i.e., by inducing a high degree of self threat) and possess the cognition that they can control and change their future fate (i.e.,as is likely to be the case with high self esteem and high achievres). ut otherwise,for the receipt of help to produce maximal slef help efforts and self improvement,the recipient has to feel that *"s/he should and can better their situation"*. As noted by Jeff and Bella,the self threat in aid from a same age tutor affects the motivational component of "should". In fact,the person is likely to be motivated to end the self threatening dependncy . Yet,whether this motivation is translated into self- help behavior is dependnt on the recipient's perception that they can control their future fate. To use the terminlolgy suggested by Bella , under this condtions the self threat in aid is interpreted as a *challenge* which results in enhanced investment of effort. aking this rationale one step further it would suggest that if self threat is associated with perceptions of inability to control one's fate it is likely to result in prolonged dependncy and helplessness like state.

Let me conclude my discussion by noting a disturbing implication of these findings and their conceptualizaion. I would like to label this phenomenon as the receiving paradox. n fact, as people who need

help are usually at a failure stage,they are less likely than those who do not receive help to espouse self perceptions of competence and self control. Therefore they are less likely to interpret the self threatening aspects in receiving help as challenge which would lead to more self help efforts and eventual self improvement. *Thus,for people who most need it help is likely to prove ineffctive and foster dependnce rather than indpendnece.* I believe that helpers' awarenss of this possibility would be an improtant step in devising ways that can avert such undesired consequences of helping relationships.

Time constraints do not allow me to elaborate other important implications in today's presentations. Let me just mention two. First,the seeking of help can not be seen as a dichotomous event (i.e., seek-not seek) . As noted by Glidewell, it should be viewed as a complex behavior that may take a variety of behavioral sahpes (e.g.,experience swapping). Second,and especially relevant in the educational context,is the fact that developmental considerations are extremely important in this regard. As noted by Nelson LeGal and DePaulo,both instrumental and self threat implications in aid are intimately related to developmental processes.

Let me cnclude by referring back to the theme with which I opened my discussion. For me as a social psychologist today's session reaffirms the importance of the link between social psychological theory and the educational process. This reaffirmation is especially improatnt in light of some recent self doubting and somewhat gloomy perceptions of social psychology. I am reminded here by Kurt Lewin's statement that :"nothing is as practical as a good theory". Today's session serves as a testament to this basic truth.

Participant 1: Russel Ames:

Using attributional framework Ames differentiates between help relevant and help irrelevant conditions. The first are conducive for help seeking whereas the second are not. His theoretical model is unique in that it looks at help seeking in environments which are ego involved and those that task involved. In the first, stigmatizing concerens which are associated with the seeking of help (e.g., showing to others that one is failing) are paramount. In the second environment, attention is drawn to the instrumental value of the help in securing the completion of the task. Ames' work notes the importance of these and similar psychological processes for understanding help seeking in the classroom .

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Participant 2: Jeffrey D. Fisher

Fisher's approach to issues sorrounding help seeking and receiving centers upon the degree of threat or support to self esteem which is inherent in the receipt of aid. His theoretical and empirical efforts view help seeking and receiving as a mixed blessing. On the one hand help contains positive self supporting

elements (e.g., instrumental benefits). On the other hand, the seeking and receiving of help is potentiallly self threatening in that it conflicts with deeply ingrained values of self reliance and independence. Fisher's work has identified major variables which moderate and determine the relative degree of self threat and self support inherent in the seeking and receiving of help.

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Participant 3: Sharon Nelson Le-Gal

Nelson Le-Gal's work in the area puts a heavy emphasis on the instrumental value of seeking help. Her work redirects attention to the simple fact that in many instances one faces two altrernatives: 1. to seek help and avoid failure, or 2. to refrain from seeking help and thereby ascertaining failure. Taken from this perspective the achievment oriented aspects rather than the stigmatizing aspects in help seeking become paramount. Her empirical and theoretical work is devoted to the consideration of help seeking as a problem solving strategy designed to achieve eventual mastery.

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Nelson-Le Gall,S. Help seeking: An understudied problem solving skill in children,Developmental Review,1981,1,224-246.

Participant 4: Bella M. DePaulo.

DePaulo's conceptual and empirical work in the context of help seeking and receiving focuses on conditions that make help 'work'. A major issue which has been somewhat neglected by social psychologists working in the area of helping behavior is the effectiveness of help. An instance of receiving help may be the first link in a chain of dependency, or it may serve as a springboard for action which will result in future improvement and independence. DePaulo's theory and research examines variables which can explain and predict either of these two consequences of receiving help.

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Participant 5: Jack C. Glidewell

Glidewell's focus in this context is quite different from that of the other authors. He centers on teachers' willingness to seek help from colleagues when they are faced with the necessity to do so. He notes that the teaching profession is permeated with norms which affect one's willingness to seek help from colleagues. Thus for example adherence to norms like: equality and autonomy inhibits help seeking. Glidewell's research and theorizing in this context leads to the important observation that motivational factors (e.g., severity of need state) may

affect behavior only when commitment to a certain professional norm is relatively weak. When commitment to a relevant norm is high, motivational factors have relatively small influence on help seeking behavior.

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